Conversation with John Godfrey

The independents' favorite engineer tells how he helped move small-format video into big-time TV

photos by Victor Ancona

The year was 1972. There were no 1-inch C VTRs, no BVUs, no digital time-base correctors. Nevertheless, the equipment at the average TV station was a paradigm of high technology compared with the primitive tools being used by growing numbers of video independents. Using rickety ½-inch reel-to-reel recorders and cheap black-and-white cameras, these emerging video artists and documentarians—like Nam June Paik and Global Village's Julie Gustafson and John Reilly—were putting images on tape the likes of which had never been seen on television before.

The fact that these tapes were seen on television at all was largely due to the efforts of John Godfrey. As head of engineering at WNET/13's newly established Television Laboratory in New York, Godfrey firmly believed that, if a tape had good content—even if the technical quality was miserable—it was the engineer's job to find a way to broadcast it. At a time when other engineers turned up their noses at small-format video, Godfrey rolled up his sleeves, went to work and put it on the air.

John Godfrey is one of those rare people who always knew exactly what he wanted to do with his life. His father bought a television when Godfrey was six years old and he has been fascinated by the medium ever since. He devoured the television and radio courses at Purdue and Indiana University—his degree is in speech and theater—and found his first job out of college duplicating 2-inch videotapes at a facility at Indiana University. It was here, he says, that he really learned videotape, spending night after night alone with six VTRs.

In 1969, Godfrey was hired away from the facility by WNDT, a public television station in New York. He arrived in New York just as the independent video scene was beginning to flower. Aside from

editing and engineering chores at WNDT, Godfrey had the challenge of trying to prepare some of these primitive independent tapes for broadcast.

WNDT merged with NET to form WNET/13 and, in 1972, the station established the Television Laboratory with Godfrey as head of engineering and David Loxton as the Lab's director. The TV Lab provided technical assistance and postproduction services to a wide range of video artists and documentarians. The Lab was also host to a series of artists in residence—Nam June Paik was the first to take advantage of this program. Another unusual aspect of the TV Lab was its commitment to actually getting independent tapes on the air; quite a few TV Lab projects have gone on to national public television. During this period Godfrey also worked for the station at large, editing specials and shows such as *Bill Moyer's Journal*.

In his 12 years at the Television Lab, John Godfrey worked long and closely with many—probably most—of the major figures in the field of independent video. Nam June Paik was so appreciative of Godfrey's contribution he insisted that Godfrey receive a co-credit on his seminal *Global Groove* tape.

Jon Alpert and Keiko Tsuno of Downtown Community TV began working with Godfrey and the TV Lab in the early '70s. It was the beginning of a fruitful partnership. Godfrey worked on a number of DCTV productions and won an Emmy for hs editing of *Third Avenue: Only the Strong Survive*. In a September, 1980, **Videography** interview, Alpert recalled that "In those days [Godfrey] was a genius but hard to work with, and today he is still a genius but easy to work with."

It's a good thing that Alpert and Godfrey work well together because today they are partners. When Godfrey left WNET/13 in 1981 he wanted more time to relax at his house in the country and to work on his collection of antique cars. But he soon found himself involved in a business venture with Jon Alpert: Electric Films, Inc., a small video postproduction company housed in DCTV's Chinatown headquarters.

The firm is unusual for several reasons. In an age of budget slashing it serves as a profit-making arm of DCTV, helping to keep that organization solvent. It also embodies some of Godfrey's attitudes about postproduction, featuring ¾-inch to 1-inch editing—a technique he recommends whenever ¾-inch is intended for broadcast—and ½-inch Betacam to 1-inch editing.

Godfrey is particularly excited about the possibilities presented by the new ½-inch broadcast systems like the Betacam. Jon Alpert has been using a single-tube Betacam for some time in his international ENG work—you may have seen some of his Nicaragua tapes on the evening news. Electric Films is set up to handle Alpert's material and Godfrey expects a wide range of clients to begin using the format as well.

Videography columnist Victor Ancona and senior editor James Meigs took the trip town to New York's Chinatown to interview Godfrey at the headquarters of DCTV and Electric Films. **Videography** readers have been hearing about this "rebel engineer" for years. We think it's time for our readers to hear Godfrey's unconventional views first hand.

Videography (Meigs): When did you first know that you wanted to work in television?

Godfrey: That was when my father bought a TV set in 1949.

Videography (Ancona): You were how old then?

Godfrey: I was six. So, I started watching TV virtually from its inception, because 1948 is more or less when commercial TV started. I started watching TV and was interested in it—in the camera work and things like that. And I wrote a paper in junior high about television, videotape and videotape developments that had gone on at that time. And then '56 or '57 is when I saw the first videotape on the air. And I said, "Hey Mom, guess what, videotape!" And she said, "What the hell are you talking about?" That's when I really started to be interested in tape.

[In school] I got out of playing violin in the orchestra. You had a choice—you either did orchestra, athletics or audiovisual aids. I figured audiovisual aids was the best way to get into television, to at least start learning with the projector and all that stuff. So, I started showing the movies in school and things like that.

When I went to college, I went to Purdue University and started off in electrical engineering, in what I call "plug and chug," which I couldn't stand.

Videography (Ancona): What do you mean by "plug and chug?"

Godfrey: Just the fact that you use formulas in engineering. Anybody can do that and computers can do it better. While I was at Purdue, they had only about six radio courses and no television courses. They had a television studio and they had one other thing which was very interesting to me—the tape duplication

center for the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction, MPATI. MPATI was actually the world's tallest television antenna until satellites came along—it was 23,500 feet. The antenna itself was only 16 feet tall, and it stuck out from the bottom side of a DC-6.

And down in the basement they had five Ampex 1000s ganged together. It was second in size only to the NET duplication center in Ann Arbor. I would always go in there—I never could operate the machines—but I sat there and watched.

Videography (Meigs): When did you get your first chance to operate a VTR?

Godfrey: The first chance was really at Indiana University. After taking three years of courses at Purdue University, I decided that the only way I was going to get some regular TV courses was to check around and go to another school. So, I went to Indiana University and took every radio and TV course that I could.

They had just built their new facility. [This was made possible] through the support of someone who has not gotten a lot of credit and really should have—Herman Wells. He was the president and the chancellor of Indiana University, but he also was one of the prime motivators in the group that started National Educational Television.

At Indiana University, they had their new facility, which was a beautiful set of studios, but they still had rather old equipment. I learned on the old RCA TR-1 tape recorder, which was this huge, five-rack-long tape machine. When it didn't work right you went up and kicked it some place. It had tubes and relays and everything else that wouldn't work.

One of the first jobs I had was doing camera on *Madame Butterfly*, which was an opera they did at the time. The funny thing about it was that this was on the old Image Orthicon cameras. This is one of the things young people really have got to learn to appreciate, the cameras that they have nowadays.

With these old Image Orthicons, it was a fixed lens, a fixed-focus lens. In other words, you had a 35, a 50, a 185 and you rotated the lens in front of the tube; to focus you turned the crank. That didn't focus the lens, that moved the tube back and forth for focus.

Now, they came out with a zoom lens; this was a new idea. Well, where do you stick the zoom lens? You stick it on the front. How do you get the zoom to work? Initially, what they did was they had a hole straight through from the back turret thing to the front of the turret. And you had a push rod that went through that turret hole and so you pushed and pulled that rod to make the camera zoom.

But, then you also had to worry about the fact that since you had two different focal things—the zoom, which had a focal length change, and the camera, which had a tube that went back and forth as focal length changed—you had to focus two things at once. Plus, [you had to] hold on to the camera and move it. It was really quite a deal. It was one of the first things I ever did.

But then I got into videotape. I went back to Purdue for half a year to get my degree and to try to decide what to do with my life and [since it was] January, 1966 and Vietnam was going hot and heavy, to decide what to do about that as well. So, I decided that I'd go for a Masters degree. And since my father had put me through college, I decided I wanted to do this on my own. So, I tried to find a job.

I called up the manager of the tech facilities at Indiana University who also was a professor there. He said that they were just starting a duplication service, and that there was no way their tape guy could handle the operation of the place as well as doing the tape duplication, so they needed someone to duplicate tapes. So, that's in fact what I did for three and a half years, from '66 until July of '69, when I came here to New York.

Videography (Ancona): What brought you to New York, to WNDT?

Godfrey: I must have made about 15,000 dubs in the three and a half years. I did 25,000 masters from somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 producing stations, so I saw every conceivable kind of problem you can imagine. And it was me and six to eight machines, alone from 11 at night to seven in the morning. And so, you either fall asleep or you learn something, and I think I learned a little something.

Anyway, one of the show series was called *Critique* and it was a very good ser-

ies done by WNDT. But, as is mostly the practice, most places will not let the master out of the house; they'll make a copy and send the copy out. Well, the copies were terrible. They had drop-outs and all sorts of problems. And so, I rejected the first eight out of nine shows. Then they sent their manager of tech facilities to find out what little Bloomington was telling big New York about how to do things. So, they solved the problem and hired me. I said, "Look, I'm not going to go there for any less than $175 a week." Boy, was I dumb. So, that's when I started here—July of '69.

Videography (Ancona): So, you were hired as an engineer?

Godfrey: As a videotape engineer for the station and editor and to improve their technical quality.

Videography (Meigs): When did you learn video editing?

Godfrey: At Indiana University. This was the old days—the real old days of the razor blade and microscope method of videotape editing where you develop the tape and cut in between the guard lines and you have about a thousandth of an inch to play with. And then, slowly, electronic editing came about.

Videography (Ancona): So, you were there for three years at the station before the Television Lab was formed in 1972?

Godfrey: Really, before the Lab was officially formed. There's a gray area in there. Previous to that, New York State Council money had created the Artist Television Workshop and that was in late '70 and '71. That had no head to it, no nothing, it was rather vague.

Videography (Ancona): So, the original concept was to go to a funding organization like the New York State Council on the Arts and say, "Can we have some equipment for artists to use at the station?"

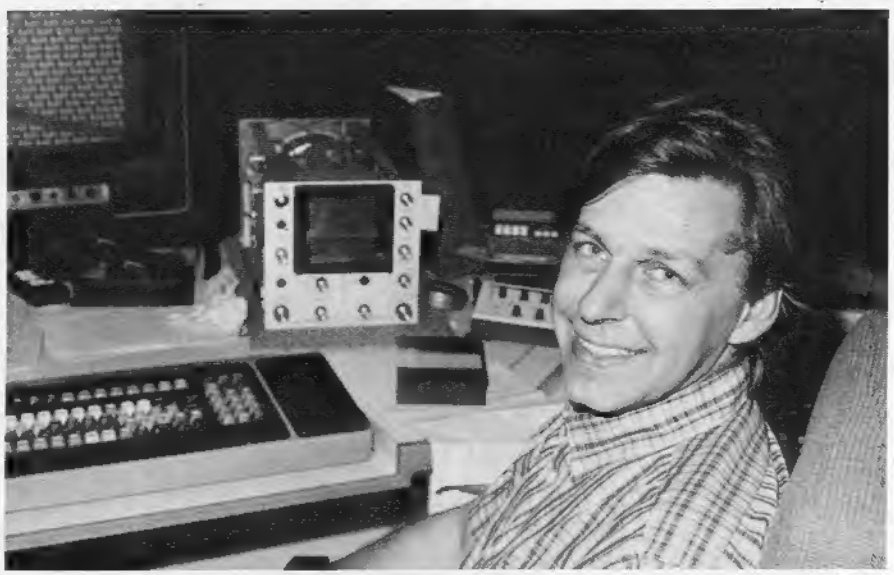
Godfrey: Right. Where they had done this previously, there were not that many problems because those stations were not union stations as such. And, the big difficulty with Channel 13 was that it was a union station. It was an IBEW house, IATSE for the stage crew.

There was also another problem: a lot of these other experimental workshops were not connected directly with their stations. They were little entities not really associated with the station. The station may have had a space for them, but they weren't really associated with the station. Nor was there any commitment on the station's part to air that crap.

Videography (Ancona): That's the difference I think; they were actually laboratories, period.

Godfrey: WNET said: It's a laboratory, but also it's a conceivably airable product.

Videography (Ancona): And that was the direction and the difference between



the various artists in residence programs in San Francisco or Boston and New York.

Godfrey: [For] many years those things went on in San Francisco and I think hardly anything got aired. In essence, the funders—although I think they were possibly wrong—said, "It isn't producing anything." It *was* producing things.

Videography (Ancona): It wasn't producing their name on television.

Godfrey: Right. That's one of my pet peeves, that a lot of funding organizations will give you money galore for programming, but they won't give you money for two other areas that are very essential: A, equipment—NYSCA was the only one that gave money for equipment; and B, administration. You've got to have someone pushing around the pencil, going around scheduling this crap and so forth. And the trouble is they want to funnel the money directly into the artist.

Videography (Ancona): I don't know what you mean by administration, but my pet peeve is that you may get funding to produce a work, but not enough funding to promote it and get it on the air.

Godfrey: What I mean by administration is paying for people like David Loxton and Carol Brandenburg and Cathy Kline. [It also costs money] to postproduce a tape; in other words, you can make the tapes cheap, but then there's the editing.

That's the difference between film and tape; with film, you've got to get your money up front for the film. And then you can spend very little money editing the thing, coming down to a final product except for opticals. With videotape, it's the other way around; you can spend very little getting hours and hours of videotape, but then you've got to spend a fortune editing it.

Videography (Meigs): One thing you were doing in those days was getting a lot of those early ½-inch tapes broadcast when other people didn't have the nerve to try it.

Godfrey: I've always been sort of a rebel engineer. This probably comes from the philosophy I developed when I was doing duplication. If you get a tape in that's a pile of crap—technically it is not good—but, like I said with the *Critique* show, content-wise it's excellent, why should you deny something from airing because of technical problems? There's got to be a way of making it right or at least passable.

What engineers do and go through to make a perfect picture is so screwed up by the time it gets home. How many times have you walked into a home to see somebody [on TV] with a big long neck and a little tiny squashed head and the brightness way the hell up and nearly no color or all color or the wrong color? Engineers spend a lot of time and trouble to get the picture perfect and then by the time it gets home, it looks like crap anyway.

You feel, though, that you've got to be able to get the content home and then try to make it the best technical quality possible. There were some very interesting shows done on ½-inch, but the technical quality just was not there.

The little technology and the big technology sort of follow each other. That is, if you gave an engineer today a perfectly recorded 2-inch videotape of an old three-inch Image Orthicon camera, he'd probably reject the thing: What a terrible picture! There's a black halo around it, there's a white halo around the black halo. He'd reject it, but yet that was the broadcast standard of the day.

Right now 525 and 1,125 is the big debate—high-definition television. But really we haven't gotten half of that. They're trying with the new [consumer] component television systems. They're upping it to where it's 330, 350 lines of resolution. They've still got to go up to

600 to get it home. But the trouble is that the manufacturers have to be able to produce a TV set with all the super comb filters and everything in it for $600 to $800 instead of $7,000.

We're straying from the subject. The ½-inch videotapes were really no worse than the early black-and-white stuff that was being shot with the TK-10s. In a lot of cases, it was a little bit better because it didn't have the problems of halo and things like that. So, the idea was to try and make it broadcastable. With the early CV decks, the only thing you could do was shoot it off a monitor.

There was no way that you could get that on the air without shooting it off a monitor. I've tried all the way up through frame storage, now that we've got all this fancy broadcast stuff, to get the Mickey Mouse stuff up. And I still can't successfully get a CV ½-inch series up. You would literally have to tear the thing apart pixel by pixel and put it back together to get it broadcastable.

But when they came out with the AV [½-inch] series, it was an interlaced pattern, it was a convertible pattern. The first show was before the TV Lab was created. It was a show called *Free Time* and it was about the Open Channel, about the beginning of cable and public access to cable. It was done in either '70 or '71.

They had some examples that they wanted to show on the air. It was either shoot it off the monitor or try to get it up to 2-inch. I wanted to try to get it up to 2-inch. You could not copy it directly to 2-inch; it was far too unstable for the servos and the timebase correctors for the 2-inch to handle it. Also the old machines couldn't be vertically lockable.

But IVC had come out with their 1-inch format tape machine. So what I did was I took the ½-inch tape and transferred it to IVC 1-inch, which I could vertically lock. Ampex had come out with their AVR-1, which had a different kind of timebase corrector in it.

In other words, the other timebase correctors basically held one line of video for about a microsecond or so and could spit it out. Any error larger than a microsecond, forget it. The AVR-1 had 32 delay lines in it; each one could hold a line for a microsecond. So, as long as one line's error was no greater than one microsecond and the next line was no greater than one microsecond, you could correct the picture.

So, by dubbing the ½-inch to 1-inch and then taking the 1-inch and playing it back through the AVR buffer and then recording on another AVR, you could actually dub material up. And I was about 20 percent successful in being able to do that. And that was about the first time that ½-inch was ever transferred up to broadcast.

Videography (Meigs): The development of the digital TBC must have made a big difference.

I remember going to the NAB in '73 and going around the floor. Then a friend said, "John, you have to see CBS' timebase corrector." So I walked into this little room. And here was a Sony ½-inch deck playing back a tape, and on a monitor the top half was going all over the place and the bottom was rock solid.

Godfrey: When that came out, that was the whole thing. I remember going to the NAB in '73 and going around the floor. Then a friend said, "John, you have to see CBS' timebase corrector." And I said, "Where is it? I haven't seen it on the floor." He said, "It's not on the floor, it's in the suite. They couldn't afford a booth or anything." So I walked up all the causeways and into this little dinky room. And here was a Sony ½-inch deck sitting on the thing playing back a tape, and on a monitor the top half was going all over the place and the bottom half was rock solid.

As soon as I saw that, I knew that that was the box and that was the way to do it. And immediately, I started to talk to the guys and showed it to David [Loxton], who was with me at the time. I said, "David, we've got to get one of these. This is it." So, I talked to the distributor I was dealing with and I said, "George, I want one. Right away. The first one. Get one, walk off with it, I don't care."

So, in June of '73, we got the first digital timebase corrector. It might have been the first one in New York City.

Videography (Ancona): You spent about 12 years at the Lab. How do you categorize this whole period? How was it in the beginning and how did you deal with these artists?

Godfrey: The initial hardest part of it was to keep the artists' hands off the TV monitor. Because they'd say, "That doesn't look right" and they'd go up to the monitor to fix it. And immediately I'd turn around and say, "You can't do that," for the simple reason that if you want the program broadcast, there is no way in hell you're going to go around to 2.3 million TV sets and adjust them the way you want them. You've got to make the picture on a standard monitor look the way you want it. That's always been the problem with television.

The biggest problem has been the other thing that engineers have been very stringent about. I just have heard something recently which does disturb me a little bit. That is that there is or may be some sort of silly FCC rule now that supposedly you have to maintain at least 80 percent video level on a program. That's ridiculous. How are you going to get any kind of mood lighting maintaining 80 percent video? That has been the problem with television all along, the fact that the lighting has always been flat. It was mainly because people were moving around.

Nowadays, people have got much more sophisticated lighting. You can light from different directions without pouring on a lot of light. You can make mood pieces, you can make things look the way you want them to look with television. You can shoot under one-candle power if you want to.

Videography (Meigs): A problem independents and video artists have had over the years is always being told that their work wasn't broadcastable, it wasn't up to the standard. Do you think engineers tend to have a bias against small-format stuff?

Godfrey: They used to. I don't think they do anymore because of the fact that the manufacturers have gotten in line with it. They have produced and made and attempted to make the smaller format usable and inexpensive and available.

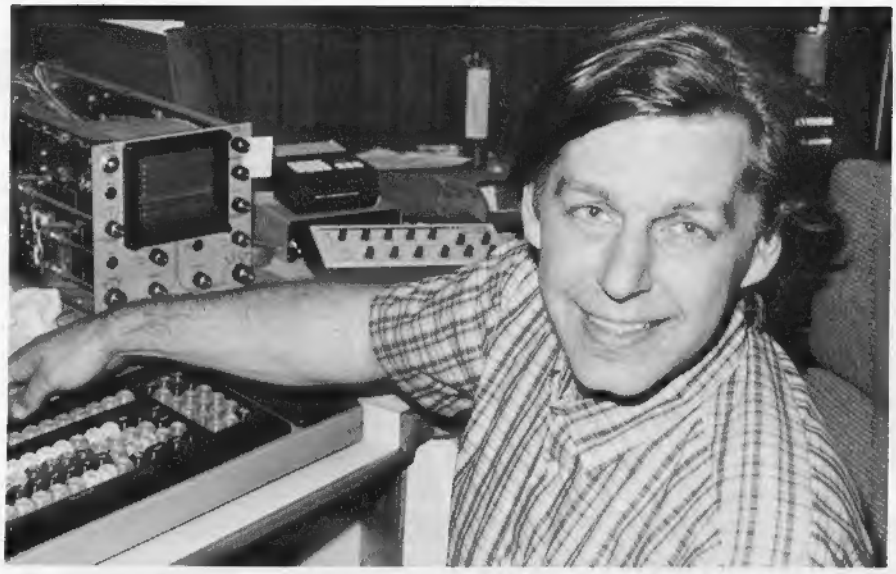
Right now, the three-tube Sony [Betacam] camera with the mixed-field Saticons is around $30,000. Now that's a camera and recorder all in one lump that gives you practically 1-inch quality. That's fabulous. It's fabulous that the manufacturers have not discounted smaller formats.

I think that's because they're aiming for one big pie in the sky which is digital storage. Eventually, you're going to get it all in a cube. You'll be able to record a show and it's just all digitally in a cube. From that point then, editing is going to be fantastic; it will be totally random access. You can treat it just like film in that you can say, "Here's the beginning, here's the end—OK, transfer." And it just goes and it transfers all the data over rather than showing it to you in real time. So that you can just whack a whole bunch of stuff together and then look at it like you can with film.

Videography (Ancona): Are the technical standards a smoke screen to keep some of the independents off the air because of the "quality" of their work?

Godfrey: I'll tell you that it's not the engineers that throw up that smoke screen. It's the people at the stations.

Videography (Ancona): Is it the management of the stations?



Godfrey: It's the management in some cases.

Videography (Ancona): How do they know what technical standards to set if they're not checking with the engineer?

Godfrey: I wouldn't blame the engineer necessarily. There *are* certain technical standards. And if you do take a look at ½-inch tape and ¾-inch tape as it exists, as it comes out of that machine, it does not conform at all with the technical standards which we're trying to set. You could take a look at another thing and that is what would you think of somebody coming into the United States and manufacturing an automobile which used little red wagon wheels? Would you feel safe driving that car? Do you see what I'm trying to get at?

Videography (Ancona): I do, but I don't accept that analogy because I'm not going to be killed by some poor tape that I see. My point is, this wouldn't be a problem if there were more engineers like you who look at the work and say: "Hey, this has quality. What can I do to move it up to broadcast quality?"

Godfrey: No, it wouldn't. You can do that in some of the cases. There are those cases which of course you don't hear about for the simple fact that their stuff doesn't get on the air. And I look at somebody's stuff and say, "This is impossible. There's no way I can possibly save this material. The only way is to reshoot it."

Videography (Ancona): But you're the kind of person who, if someone brings you that kind of a work and you tell them it's impossible, will not be antagonistic. You will tell them why and you will help them.

Godfrey: I'm very antagonistic; that's my way. I'll look at it and say, "This is crap." I've driven people to tears.

Videography (Ancona): You have, but I can point to many people who have taken what you've said to heart and have produced better works thanks to you.

Godfrey: I don't let the word impossible get in my way. Nothing is impossible. It may be improbable, but it's not impossible. And that's the thing that I think has to be looked at. As I said, there are cases where producers or people who are in charge of programming will take some independent's work and look at it and reject it not on content, but will say,

Broadcast quality—ha, ha, ha. If it looks great, it's broadcast quality. If an engineer can't tell it's Mickey Mouse equipment, it's broadcast quality.

"This doesn't meet our technical standards."

What they really want to say, but they don't want to hurt the person's feelings, is that the program is crap. They'll say, "It doesn't meet our technical standards," and all of a sudden that's a blanket thing for rejecting a program. And that's one thing that's wrong because I think that a lot of people nowadays can produce quite technically acceptable programming. It may still be crap. But I think people ought to be honest—this is a communications industry.

Videography (Meigs): How does one define the elusive broadcast quality, then?

Godfrey: Broadcast quality—ha, ha, ha. If it looks great, it's broadcast quality. If an engineer can't tell that it's Mickey Mouse equipment, it's broadcast quality. That's what it boils down to, sort of.

Broadcast quality means that the sync has got to stay within the specs—the vertical and horizontal blanking have got to be within the specifications of the FCC. They look for noise in the tape. I really do not believe in airing, if at all possible, second-generation ¾-inch. If you can afford it, you should edit directly from the ¾-inch to 1-inch or to the broadcast standard. Make it transparent. I've gone on [the air with] *Pilobolus and Joan*, Ed Emshwiller's piece. There's one section in there that is 17 generations deep. You tell a film person that you've made something 17 generations, they'll tell you it's impossible. They can't make something five film generations deep and make it look halfway good.

Videography (Meigs): Seventeen generations of 1-inch?

Godfrey: Seventeen 2-inch generations. In other words, it's a dub of a dub of a dub, etc. But each time a new layer was added. Most broadcast shows that come out of WNET by the time they get down to PBS are at least fifth or sixth generation because of the way you end up producing it, and then end up making a copy off of your master. There are sections of broadcast-quality programs that are nine generations deep.

The problem with the smaller gear is that it can't stand the multiple generations. That's the real problem. Initial ¾-inch done with a good camera, unless you're looking at wide shots, is virtually indiscernible from the same camera on 1-inch unless you compare it side by side with a split screen. I think now if you take the new ½-inch formats and possibly the Bosch ¼-inch—I haven't seen that yet—and do a side by side, you'll find that it is virtually indistinguishable from 1-inch.

Videography (Meigs): But there you can also maintain the generations better than ¾-inch, can't you?

Godfrey: Yes and no. There are a few problems with the component systems yet. They will be ironed out in the near future. As a matter of fact, you'll probably see component switchers coming out

now. Grass Valley has shown a theoretical one, a prototype which could lead to some fantastic things as far as multiple generations and multiple effects and the ability to do chromakeys surperbly. If you want the ultimate, you have to go to Ultimatte. There's no question, you can't go to anybody else. But soon, with being able to do component recording, component playback, component mixing, you'll be able to improve the quality.

But again, this is big bucks stuff. What I'm talking about is that with the independents you've got to try to maintain as close to first generation as possible to have a broadcaster accept it. Every single news story you see on the networks is at least second generation. Because they edit ¾ to ¾. But if you notice at home—because the home receiver is not capable of seeing anything better than ¾-inch—you'll notice that there is no distinguishable difference between the second-generation, edited news story and the live, in-studio camera except for possibly the noise.

Videography (Ancona): Why did you leave NET?

Godfrey: I was tired. I'd worked there for 12 years. I'd actually put in somewhere in the neighborhood of 18 years worth of work in the place. I like NET and they have a rather unique situation there. I wasn't just an engineer there. I ordered the equipment, I designed the rooms, I built the rooms, I maintained the rooms, I ran the rooms. I did more than just what an engineer does, which is push the buttons.

I like doing a variety of things. I like to set my own schedule. Plus the fact that I've got a nice home in the country that I want to work on. Deep down inside, there's another thing too. In 1976, my father retired; [I felt] if he can retire so can I!

Videography (Ancona): What are your ideas for Electric Films, Inc. and why do you say Electric Films instead of Electronic Films?

Godfrey: What we wanted to do was call it Electronic Cinematography, but to say Electronic Cinematography is too much, too many words. Electric Films just sounds better, it's easier to say.

Videography (Ancona): So what is your concept for Electric Films?

Godfrey: One concept, of course, is to make money. That's an ideal concept.

Videography (Ancona): So you're a profit-oriented corporation?

Godfrey: Yes, in a way. The main idea between Jon [Alpert] and me as far as creating this was twofold. One, to be able to create a facility so he doesn't have to move. Because he loves to just sit in his room, lie on his couch here, go to karate and ride his motorcycle around. That's the extent of his enjoyment of life.

My enjoyment of life is considerably different. I'm very Republican in the way I enjoy money, I enjoy living, I enjoy the house I'm at and the cars I have. I enjoy having a lot of time away from work. So, I'm very profit-oriented. But I'm not *that* money-hungry. I don't necessarily have to own a company, I'd be satisfied with part of a company. I could never own part of Channel 13 and that's a big problem. I want to be able to retire well and have people make money for me. Consequently, I wanted to start a company that would make money that way.

Videography (Ancona): So you are the two principals?

Godfrey: Yes, Jon and I.

Videography (Ancona): Do you have a staff?

Godfrey: Basically, we mostly use the DCTV staff. Let me finish with the main principle of Electric Films which is to supply money to Downtown Community TV.

Videography (Meigs): It's a profit-making arm of DCTV?

Godfrey: Yes, in essence. The major part of the profits of the company go to support the staff and various things—you know, those things that you don't get money for like new equipment and administration. Basically, that's what the profits of Electric Films support.

Videography (Ancona): I think that says something about John Godfrey, that you are interested in that approach.

Godfrey: I'm interested in the approach because it is an interesting way to be able to fund an experimental type of place. I think it has to be, especially when you've got the fluctuating funds coming from corporations and so forth. Sometimes they can't supply money—the past two years have been absolutely horrible for any kind of money supply to the CPB. Also, the cable companies have found out they've got to have sponsors to make it. They've got to have commercials.

If you take a look at film and where commercial film stands today, you'll find that one of the biggest problems is cost. The unions have brought up the cost of production, of doing things. Everything has just gone skyrocketing. Of course, you will have fewer independents. They can't afford to go off and handle that processing done in film. That's one of the reasons they're changing to videotape because it was inexpensive.

The only trouble is that now videotape is becoming expensive, mainly in the postproduction area because of two things. One, the cost of the boxes and two, the cost of the switchers. Now, tape machines have come down in price but if you notice, the price of videotape editing has not gone down. With three machines, 1-inch, you can probably get away with $225,000. Whereas in 2-inch, it's $165,000 per machine. Three times 165 works out to be $490,000. So, the cost of the videotape machine has halved. But the cost of the switcher, which you initally bought for $35,000, is now $185,000—the [Grass Valley] 300 series switcher and the special effects things. So, the relative cost of videotape editing, which should have been going down, has actually stayed about the same.

Videography (Meigs): I understand you have a Betacam and Betacam playback unit. How is that working out?

Godfrey: It's gorgeous. It has gorgeous, absolutely beautiful pictures.

Videography (Meigs): And you have one BVW-10 studio playback unit?

Godfrey: Right now we have one studio playback. We've got a second studio playback that we could purchase, but actually, I've found a way around it. What happens in most documentaries is that you go off and shoot and there's no way that you can plan that on two different tapes are going to be the two different shots that you're going to dissolve from [in editing]. Invariably, they always end up on the same reel and so you've got to make a copy. So, I've devised a little way where I don't need to have two Betacam [decks]. (Besides that, the recorder isn't going to be available 'till October.)

Videography (Meigs): You mean the

editing Betacam deck.

Godfrey: Yes. The recording studio Betacam is not available. What I do is dub off the tail end of the shot on to the [BVU] 800 and make a match edit into the 800 for the 30 frames of the dissolve. So, it drops down in quality for that 30 frames. But the thing is, you can't really see it because it's going through a dissolve at the time, going back to the Betacam. So, you don't really see that loss of quality for that 30 frames.

Videography (Meigs): Has Jon Alpert been using the single-tube Betacam?

Godfrey: Yes, mainly because that was the only one available.

Videography (Meigs): How does it look?

Godfrey: How it looks is the following: He came back with the material and we started to edit the material. I looked at it and said, "It's OK, it looks nice, it looks a little bit crisper and more detailed than the ¾-inch." We edited it for a month. Afterwards, we went back to another project that we had started earlier which was done on ¾-inch. I put out the ¾, which is beautiful-looking stuff in and of itself, but I've been used to seeing all the Betacam stuff. And I looked at the ¾ and it looked terrible!

The single-tube camera is very good-looking, and I can't wait to see what the three-tube looks like. In fact, I have seen a little bit with the three-tube camera and it's really fabulous. You can take a wide shot of a brick building and count the bricks. That's where the big difference in the horizontal resolution is, wide shots. Most stuff in documentaries is usually tight shots of people. Very rarely do you get wide shots where you really need to see detail. So, the difference in resolution quality between ¾-inch and the Betacam or 1-inch is negligible unless you really want to count zits on somebody's face. It's only in wide shots that the telltale difference comes and also, again, in multiple generations.

Videography (Meigs): What do you think is going to happen to ¾-inch?

Godfrey: There's probably a big debate going on among the manufacturers about whether they should change it to a component recording system, whether they should actually make a ¾-inch component system or whether they should drop it entirely. [They're debating] whether they should go to an entirely new ¼-inch digital recording system or to composite ½-inch digital recording or to composite ¼-inch digital recording. These are the things that have got to be thought out. The way technology is moving nowadays, it's very difficult to try and guess. Frankly, if ½-inch component recording had come about five years ago, you would have never seen the 1-inch.

Videography (Meigs): If you were building a small facility now and wanted more than ¾-inch quality, would you think about not going with 1-inch and just going with ½-inch?

Godfrey: No. Right now, I'm not happy with what I've seen of second-generation Beta or second-generation RCA [Hawkeye]. It's much better than ¾-inch, but I'm not that happy.

Videography (Meigs): It's not a pure substitute for 1-inch?

Godfrey: Not quite yet. It will be very shortly—in a year or so. I think I still would master on 1-inch.

Videography (Meigs): What do you think of all these developments in the small formats? What does this mean for the independent—how many can afford to get into this kind of stuff? It's certainly more affordable than 1-inch.

Godfrey: What an independent should think about doing, though nobody likes to think about doing this because they want to own their own equipment, is to work out a plan for leasing the equipment. Because then, when the new generation comes about, you say, "Here, take this old pile of crap and give me the new one." And you continue leasing it. It's the same as buying it on time, which is what most independents would have

to do anyway unless they plunk down the money. So, they might consider doing that.

In other words, most independents set themselves up as corporations anyway. So, consequently they can knock off all their costs, all the things that they can't get money for—their cost of administration and equipment. But they still want to own the equipment. Maybe they should rethink that, maybe they should go ahead and start leasing stuff. Because they're going to pay roughly the same percentage of interest whether they lease it or take out a loan. With leasing it, you could turn it around and get new stuff. And maybe the manufacturing companies should think about this too.

Videography (Ancona): Have you had any hankering to produce your own shows?

Godfrey: Always, but I'm always too busy doing everybody else's.

Videography (Ancona): What kind of show would you like to produce?

Godfrey: I like entertainment.

Videography (Ancona): You mean documentaries can't be entertaining?

Godfrey: Documentaries can be entertaining, but they are manipulated in the editing rather than the acting. I like acting. That's what my degree is in—speech and theatre. But I like to do all things; I wouldn't like to do entertainment shows all the time, I wouldn't like to do commercials or presentation tapes or documentaries all the time.

One advantage I do have over almost every other producer is the fact that I have worked on more shows than they have. I have seen more ways of doing shows than they have. I probably would make a good production manager, because I could figure out a way to keep the cost down as low as possible.

Videography (Ancona): If I were a producer, at what point in production should I begin talking with you?

Godfrey: Immediately. This is one thing we did at the TV Lab and I've tried to carry it through even with people who want to use the facility or are thinking about editing here.

The main thing is that I like to have preproduction meetings to talk about what you're going to do, what's your purpose, how you're going to shoot it, what you should keep an eye out for and how much money have you got to shoot and edit.

You can plan this all out before you go and do it, rather than going and doing it and shooting your wallet on shooting and finding out that you have three dollars to edit the thing. Then even editing a presentation tape becomes difficult, because then you have to edit a presentation tape that's three to five minutes long and really does not reflect the flow or the way the whole show should go together, because you can't even spend the money to edit the seven minutes or so that would be a real representation of what the piece should be.

Videography (Ancona): In a sense you're telling me that if I came to you and asked what kind of a camera I should be using . . .?

Godfrey: I'll give you some advice on that. I don't know all the cameras. I think you should go out and take a look at cameras yourself and talk to people; you'll get impressions. It's like buying equipment—VTRs and editing systems. I have my biases of what I like and I'll say, "Use this, use this, use this," but I'll also say that you should really make up your own mind according to your budget, too.

Videography (Meigs): You're an engineer who's also interested in content, probably more than most engineers. You've worked on a lot of documentaries.

Godfrey: More and more engineers are interested in content. The engineer who sits down and is operating tape machines sees an awful lot of programs and knows what he likes and dislikes. Consequently, everyone develops a taste as far as what they like.

Videography: Thank you, John Godfrey.